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[Home](#) > [Faculty Articles](#) > [George Gunn](#) > One Article



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Progressive Dispensationalism's use of Peter's Pentecost Sermon, Acts 2:14-36

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In the latter 1980s and early 1990s, a few scholars and theologians began to move away from the historical dispensational position (also called "Classical," "Normative" or "Essential" Dispensationalism). [1] They developed an approach to understanding God's program for the Church and Israel that differed significantly from that of historical dispensationalism. They called this new approach "Progressive Dispensationalism." The features that distinguish progressive dispensationalism from historical dispensationalism are: 1) A greater focus on the continuity between the peoples of God of different ages; 2) An insistence that Jesus has already begun (at least to a degree) a fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant; and 3) Adoption of a distinctive hermeneutic called a "complementary hermeneutic." [2] To many normative dispensationalists, the view that the church is fulfilling the Davidic Covenant blurs the distinction between Israel and the Church. Such a position would significantly weaken the argument for a pretribulational rapture. It must be acknowledged at this time, however, that progressive dispensationalist Craig Blaising affirms a pretribulational rapture position, albeit in relatively weak terms: "This deliverance, or rapture, would appear to coincide with the inception or coming of the Day of the Lord, since that is the focus in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4 ." [3] As of this writing, progressive dispensationalists have not written much specifically addressing the issue of the timing of the rapture. To my knowledge, none has claimed a position other than the pretribulational one. However, their theological system moves in the direction of covenant premillennialism, whose adherents have traditionally held to a posttribulational rapture. Only time will tell what the disciples of the first generation of progressive dispensationalists will do with the rapture issue.

Today, progressive dispensationalism is becoming an increasingly popular position among the faculty at many colleges and seminaries that previously held to the historical form of dispensational premillennialism and a pretribulational rapture of the church. Because progressive dispensationalism takes positions that remove some of the strongest arguments in favor of a pretribulational rapture of the church

and of a purpose for God's future restoration of Israel , this position has concerned many normative dispensationalists.

Significance of the Sermon

Progressive dispensationalists have argued that at Christ's ascension He started to fulfill the Davidic Covenant by being seated on David's throne. Whether this can actually be seen as a "reigning" seems to be a point of debate among progressive dispensationalists. Darrell Bock frequently uses the terms "rule" or "reign" in reference to Christ's present fulfilling of the Davidic Covenant. [4] Craig Blaising, however, seems to prefer the term "enthronement" as opposed to "rule" or "reign." [5] Nevertheless, Blaising uses terminology that clearly attributes to Christ's present ministry a Davidic "rule" or "reign." For example, he refers to

the preeminence of His kingdom over all rule and authority on earth as seen in the language in Psalm 89:27 : 'I also shall make Him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth' As we have seen, New Testament theology portrays the 'raising up' of Jesus to the Davidic kingship as taking place in His resurrection from the dead. Consequently, Colossians 1:18 declares Him to be the ruler. [6]

Blaising further states, "The Messiah has been raised up, seated (enthroned) at the right hand of God, all things, specifically all rule and authority, have been subjected to Him..." [7] On the other hand, Robert Saucy, while affirming that Christ's present position at God's right hand is essentially an enthronement on the Davidic throne, nevertheless rejects the view that Christ's current status is one of "reigning." [8] But Saucy's position still attributes to the present dispensation a partial fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, and thus a blurring of the Biblical distinction between Israel and the Church.

This is a noteworthy contrast to what dispensationalists have historically held. A significant tenet of dispensationalism has historically been that Christ's Davidic rule will not begin until his second coming when He is seated on the throne of David in Jerusalem during the millennium. In an effort to find support for the progressive dispensationalist's position, Darrell Bock has insisted that Peter, in his Acts 2 sermon, established an exegetical "link" between Psalm 110's "sit" (110:1) and Psalm 132's "set" (or "seat," 132:11), thus placing the seating of Christ on David's throne at the time of the ascension. [9]

The progressive dispensationalists' view has two major problems: It requires a non-literal interpretation of Psalm 110; and it involves a faulty exegesis of Peter's sermon in Acts 2. The interpretation of Psalm 110 has been dealt with in detail elsewhere. [10] Here, I would like to focus attention on the exegesis of Peter's sermon.

Setting of the Sermon

This sermon certainly has significance being the first sermon preached in the

church age. However, it must also be recognized that this sermon was preached in the church's infancy and immaturity. F. F. Bruce noted that this sermon has

... marks of [an] early date, such as the hope expressed that 'all the house of Israel', to whom the proclamation is first made, may repent as a nation, that the Messianic Age may be inaugurated at once (cf. ii.36; iii.19 ff.). [\[11\]](#)

Bruce notes further,

In this and other sermons in the earlier part of Ac. we should observe the absence of the Pauline emphasis on the pre-existence of Jesus, on His unique relation to the Father, on His sin-bearing, on justification (contrast Paul's own words in xiii.39), on the moral and spiritual power of the Resurrection, on the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. What we do find is Christian preaching of an obviously primitive character, against the background of Jewish Messianic expectation. [\[12\]](#)

On the Day of Pentecost, no Gentiles had yet come into the church. In fact, Peter and the other apostles had not yet fully grasped that Jesus' redemptive work would extend in a significant way to the Gentiles. Before the crucifixion, they had thought that Jesus had come to assume the Davidic throne and rule over Israel (Mt 19:28 ; 20:21). The crucifixion had dashed those hopes and had left the disciples disappointed and dismayed (Lk 24:21). However, following the resurrection, the disciples' anticipation that Jesus would immediately establish the kingdom was revived (Ac 1:6). It is noteworthy that Jesus did not correct this anticipation. He did not tell them that a long period would precede the establishment of the kingdom. He did not tell them that Jewish involvement in the church would wane or that increasing numbers of Gentiles would come into the church. He said nothing about the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile being broken down (Eph 2:14) so that there would no longer be a Jewish distinctiveness to the way God would work in the world. [\[13\]](#) He only told them that it was not for them to know about the times or the seasons (Ac 1:7). And, though Jesus may have indicated in some of His teachings that there would be some delay (e.g., such parables as that of the minas, Luke 19:11 ff, and the story of the widow not to lose heart over the delay, Luke. 18), Acts 1 clearly shows that the disciples were not expecting any more delay after the post-resurrection events.

In their early teaching and preaching, the apostles did not comprehend that a lengthy church age reaching out to masses of Gentiles would intervene between the ascension and establishment of the kingdom. Note the difficulty with which Peter was persuaded to take the gospel to the God fearing Gentile Cornelius (Ac 10:9-22). Thus, it is no surprise to see Peter on the Day of Pentecost anticipating Jesus being seated on David's (earthly) throne. This requires neither that Jesus was already so seated, nor that He must be so seated soon. It is only to say that from the perspective of the early Jewish Christians their anticipation was that Jesus would

soon be seated on David's throne, reigning from Jerusalem over Israel as Messiah and King.

Summary Statement of the Sermon

Those who hold to a literal hermeneutic place a high value on what is known as *authorial intent*. A proper interpretation of Peter's sermon will need to focus on how Peter himself understood his own words. In verse 36, Peter sums up his message in these words: "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God made this Jesus whom you crucified *both Lord and Messiah*." Most English translations use the word "Christ" instead of "Messiah." The English reader needs to remember, however, that the word "Christ" is simply a Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah." The verb "made" is from the Greek ποιέω (*poieo*) which, according to the authoritative lexicon by Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, Bauer, in a structure like this (taking a double accusative) takes a meaning like, "Claim that someone is someth[ing]." [14] Thus, Acts 2: 36 means, "God has *proclaimed* Him to be both Lord and Messiah."

Later in this chapter, when we consider the structure of the sermon, it will be seen that the words "both Lord and Messiah" refer back to two distinct sections of Peter's sermon. But for now, let us consider the meaning of these two terms and how they relate to each other.

Messiah. Usually rendered "Christ" in the NT, this term means "anointed." Both the Old Testament Hebrew term (מָשִׁיחַ *Mashiach* from which we get "Messiah") and the New Testament Greek term (Χριστός *Christos* from which we get "Christ") mean "anointed." Earlier Christian interpreters frequently explained that the Messiah fulfilled the three anointed offices of the Old Testament – prophet, priest and king. [15] However, of these three, only two (priest and king) can truly be considered as "anointed" offices. The only prophet in the Old Testament supposedly connected with a rite of anointing is Elisha (1Ki 19: 16 [16]) and even he was not actually anointed, but merely had Elijah's mantle cast over him (1Ki 19: 19).

In the first century, the term "Messiah" was understood as denoting the King who will arise in the latter days to fulfill the covenant God had made with David (2 Sam 7: 12-16). There were some, especially the Qumran sect that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, who held to a belief in two eschatological Messiahs – a kingly Messiah (from David) and a priestly Messiah (from Zadok) [17], but this appears to have been a minority position, based in part on Zechariah's prophecy concerning Joshua (Zech 6: 9-15). It is possible that the brief reign of the Hasmonean priest/kings over Israel (ca. 142 to 63 B.C.) produced a reaction by the majority Israelite population in focusing on the Davidic aspect of Messiah, while minimizing the priestly aspect. "It is ... reasonable to suppose that when Aristobulus I and his heirs became kings the Bible-based belief in a Messiah of the dynasty of David was intensified." [18] The idea of the kingly Messiah from the house of David is reflected in the 14th benediction of

the Palestinian recension of the Prayer of Eighteen Benedictions,

In thy great mercy O Yahweh our God, have pity on Israel thy people, and on Jerusalem thy city, and on Zion the habitation of thy glory, and on thy temple, and on thy dwelling, and on the monarchy of the house of David, the Messiah of thy righteousness. [\[19\]](#)

The identification of Jesus as the Davidic Messiah was made from the very earliest of the birth narratives (Lk 1:32-33, 69; 2:11; Mt 1:1). The earliest New Testament references to Jesus as the "Christ" are intended to identify him as the Davidic Messiah, the One who will rule from the throne of David as the eschatological King. Later, as the Gentile influence became more prominent within the church, references tend to use the term "Christ" not as a descriptive title, but as a name, not necessarily carrying a Davidic implication. Longenecker observes:

In the twelve instances in Acts where the word "Christ" appears singly (2:31, 36; 3:18; 4:26; 8:5; 9:22; 17:3a; 26:23; and in 3:20; 5:42; 18:5, 28, where "Christ" is in apposition to "Jesus" but still "used" singly), it is used as a title – usually articular in form (except here [2:36] and at 3:20) – but not as a name. And in every instance where it appears as a title, it is in an address to a Jewish audience (only 8:5 and 26:23 are possible exceptions, though both the Samaritans and Agrippa II possessed something of a Jewish background and understanding).... Apparently, therefore, the messiahship of Jesus was the distinctive feature of the church's witness within Jewish circles, signifying, as it does, his fulfillment of Israel's hopes and his culmination of God's redemptive purposes. [\[20\]](#)

Thus, in asserting that God has made Jesus to be "Messiah," Peter is affirming the Davidic kingly role of Jesus.

Lord. The Greek word *κύριος* (*Kurios*), translated here "Lord," was the normal word used in the Septuagint to translate the Name of God. Though it *could* be used to refer to concepts other than deity (as in John 4:11, 15, 19), the New Testament regularly does use this term to refer to Jesus' deity (e.g. Rom 10:9; Phil 2:10). This was precisely Jesus' point in His encounter with the Pharisees recorded in Matthew 22:41-46 (also in Mk 12:35-37 and Lk 20:41-44).

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Messiah, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "The son of David." He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' [*κύριος Kurios*] saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet'?" "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' [*κύριος Kurios*] how is He his son?"

In quoting from Psalm 110:1, Jesus is attempting to get the Pharisees to understand that the Messiah is more than merely the son of David. In fact, he is nothing less than Yahweh, the God of Israel. Both the New Testament and the Septuagint use the

word κύριος (*Kurios*) to translate both occurrences of "Lord" in Psalm 110:1 .

With reference to Peter's use of κύριος (*Kurios*) in Acts 2:36 Longenecker says, "The title 'Lord' was also proclaimed christologically in Jewish circles, with evident intent to apply to Jesus all that was said of God in the Old Testament (cf. the Christological use of Isa 45:23 in Phil 2:10)." [21] Thus, in asserting that God has made Jesus to be "Lord," Peter is affirming the deity of Jesus.

A related question is whether Psalm 110 may be taken as relating to the Davidic Covenant. Jesus' interpretation of the Psalm in the Mark 12 passage is informative. One significant point of Jesus' question to the Pharisees has been lost in most modern translations. The King James Version translates Mark 12:37 as, "David therefore himself calleth him Lord: and whence is he then his son?" The New King James Version and the New International Version, on the other hand, conform the translation to that of the other synoptic gospels ("how is he then his son?" [22]), losing the original force of the Greek word πόθεν (*pothen*), unique to Mark's account. [23] Jesus' question to the Scribes, the Jewish interpreters, is, "Whence" ("from where," i.e. from what passage) is the Messiah the son of David? πόθεν (*Pothen*) is used here with the sense of "from what source of authority." [24] This usage is illustrated, for example, in Mark 6:1-2 . When Jesus came into Nazareth and began to teach the people, they responded with amazement at his teaching and asked the question, "Whence are these things?" (Πόθεν τούτω ταῦτα *Pothen touto tauta*); in other words, "What is the source of his authority?" Another example of this usage, though from a different perspective, is seen in Luke 20:7 where Jesus challenges the chief priests, scribes and elders with the question, "The baptism of John: was it from heaven [ἐξ οὐρανοῦ *ex ouranou*] or from men [ἐξ ἀνθρώπων *ex anthropon*]" (verse 4). Realizing their perilous position (verses 5-6), they replied, "We don't know from where [μὴ εἶδέναι πόθεν *me eidenai pothen*,]" (v.7). Here πόθεν (*pothen*) is clearly the semantic answer to the prepositional phrases with ἐκ (*ek*), denoting the source of authority for John's baptism (viz., "heaven" [=God] or "men").

Mark's version of Jesus' response to the Scribes' teaching about the Messiah being David's Son in 12:35-37 focuses on the source of authority for making such a claim; this is the force of Mark's use of πόθεν (*pothen*). The Scribes appear to have used Psalm 110:1 as a proof text for their point. Jesus does not deny that Messiah is to be a descendent of David's, but he does take issue with the Scribes' interpretation of Psalm 110 . We might paraphrase Jesus' response as follows: "You say that Messiah is David's Son? Fine, but on what authority (πόθεν *pothen*) do you make that assertion? Psalm 110 ? Impossible! For in that Psalm David addresses Messiah as his Lord, not his son."

The implication is that Jesus knew their literal understanding of Psalm 110 could not allow them to see the Psalm as referring to the Davidic covenant. For them to justify their belief that the Messiah must be a son of David they would have to provide another passage. This passage, on the other hand, promoted something else. Their understanding of the Messiah needed to be expanded to include the

Messiah as being more than just a future Davidic King. Jesus says that Psalm 110 puts the Messiah on a plane higher than David or any mere human descendant of his. This Messiah is on an equal footing with Yahweh. His opponents understood well his arguments and because they could not agree with his conclusions nor refute them, they preferred to remain silent.

Relationship between "Lord" and "Messiah."

1. The Two-fold Confession.

Peter concludes his sermon in verse 36 by claiming that God has made Jesus to be both deity and Davidic Kingly Messiah. This two-fold confession is seen a number of times in the New Testament and appears to be perhaps the earliest Christian confession of faith. According to Matthew 16:16, Peter himself was among the first to recognize this twofold nature of Jesus' identity. At that time, in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter, receiving information from God the Father, replied:

"You are the Messiah,
The Son of the Living God."

This two-fold confession acknowledged first, that Jesus was the one sent by God to rule from David's throne ("the Messiah"); and second, that Jesus was no less than deity ("the Son of the Living God"). Though it is possible to view the term "Son" as being synonymous with the term Messiah, based on the use of the term "Son" along with Messianic terms ("anointed" and "king") in Psalm 2, nevertheless, a comparison of the New Testament passages citing the twofold confession appears to connect the term "Son of (the Living) God" with the term "Lord," an affirmation of deity. Note the following New Testament references to this twofold confession:

	<u>Davidic Kingship</u>	<u>Deity</u>
Matthew 16:16	Messiah	Son of the Living God
Matthew 26:63	Messiah	Son of God
Mark 1:1	Messiah	Son of God
John 1:49	King of Israel	Son of God
John 11:27	Messiah	Son of God
John 20:31	Messiah	Son of God
Acts 2:36	Messiah	Lord
Romans 1:3-4	The seed of David	Son of God
1 John 4:15; 5:1	Messiah	Son of God

2. The Grammatical Correlative Relationship.

Progressive dispensationalists agree that the title "Christ" identifies Jesus as the promised Davidic King. [25] However, they differ from historical dispensationalists by insisting that Jesus began his Davidic reign at the ascension. Darrell Bock explains as follows:

Peter argues in Acts 2:22-36 that David predicted in Psalm 16 that this descendant would be raised up from the dead, incorruptible, and *in this way*, He

would be seated upon His throne (Acts 2: 30-31). He then argues that this enthronement has taken place upon the entrance of Jesus into heaven in keeping with the language of Psalm 110: 1 that describes the seating of David's son at God's right hand. [\[26\]](#)

There are several problems with this line of reasoning. Under "The Structure of the Sermon" below, I will discuss the problem with the way Bock has tried to link Psalm 110: 1 with Psalm 132: 11 . For now, however, I want to stay with Peter's statement in Acts 2: 36 a little longer. Peter joins the two terms "Lord" and "Messiah" in the form of a "both – and" correlative structure. Grammarians refer to the correlative conjunctions as those that occur in pairs to join two items together in a relationship ("both ... and," "not only ... but also," "not ... but," "either ... or," "neither ... nor," "whether ... or," "as ... as," etc.). The kind of relationship expressed can emphasize either identity (connective), similarity (comparative) or contrast (adversative). The correlative structure in Acts 2: 36 uses the repeated Greek conjunction *καί* (*kai*) before each term. According to the standard New Testament Greek Lexicon by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker this correlative relationship typically denotes a contrast, rather than an identity, between the two terms joined: "*not only. . . , but also ...* Introducing contrasts: *although. . . yet.*" [\[27\]](#) According to Blass, DeBrunner and Funk's Grammar of the Greek New Testament it is used, "to sharpen the distinction between the two..." [\[28\]](#) and may be translated, "'on the one hand ... on the other.'" [\[29\]](#) Bock's exegesis does everything it can to link together the seating on David's throne (connected to the title "Messiah") with the seating at God's right hand (connected to the title "Lord"), but the correlative conjunctions used here suggest the idea of contrast, more than connection. [\[30\]](#) Peter could have used a different way of joining the two terms if he had wanted to emphasize their identity more strongly. For example, he could have expressed either an epexegetical or an appositional relationship. [\[31\]](#) Instead, he chose a construction that would emphasize contrast. Though this observation by itself does not absolutely prove Bock's interpretation to be wrong, when taken with observations that will be made about the structure of the sermon itself, it provides important confirmation that Christ's seating on the throne of David is seen *in contrast to* His seating at the right hand of God.

3. The Chronological Relationship Between the Two Seatings.

The faithful in Israel had been awaiting the coming of the Messiah for many generations. When John the Baptist began his ministry, he identified Jesus as the Messiah (Jn 1: 24-27), but merely *identifying* Him as Messiah, did not mean that the Davidic reign had begun. In fact, John testified that there would be a period of judgment preceding Messiah's reign, a period of winnowing, separating and burning:

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will

thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:11-12)

Frequently referred to as the "Tribulation Period," this time of judgment is identified by the Old Testament prophets as the "Day of the Lord" and, in Daniel, the seventieth "week," which culminates in the arrival of the Messiah to rule from David's throne. Joel 2:30-3:1 sets forth the order of events:

I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls. For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem .

Malachi very clearly reveals that the messenger introduces a time of judgment that precedes the Messianic rule:

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts.... "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall." (Mal 3:1-5; 4:1-2)

As was the case with John the Baptist, one can identify or proclaim Jesus as Messiah before it is time for Him to reign as Messiah, and this is what Peter does in His sermon. Peter, in affirming that God had proclaimed Jesus both "Lord" and "Messiah," (Acts 2:36) appealed to two Old Testament references: Psalm 132:11-12 and Psalm 110:1 . Psalm 132 is Messianic and refers to the seating of David's descendant on his throne. But Psalm 110 is set in the context of the Tribulation Period preceding the Davidic reign (see especially vv. 5-7). The Lord of Psalm 110 is not the Son of David. He is David's Lord (see Mt 22:41-46). Though we know that it is the same Person, it is nevertheless true that there are two distinct

roles in view, and that the role of the judging Lord comes before the role of the reigning Son of David. Peter is saying, "This Jesus, whom you crucified, is both the Lord, who is coming in tribulational judgment, and Messiah, who will then reign on the throne of David."

Structure of the Sermon

Peter's sermon in Acts 2 shows a very definite order and structure. Two features in particular mark out discourse and topic boundaries in the sermon. First, the sermon is divided into 3 sections by the repeated vocatives: v. 14 "Judean Men" (Ἄνδρες Ἰουδαῖοι *Andres Ioudaioi*), v. 22 "Israelite Men" (Ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλιῖται *Andres Israelitai*), v. 29 "Men, Brothers" (Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί *Andres Adelphoi*). These three sections may be outlined as follows:

- I. Verses 14-21, Apologetic for Speaking in Tongues
- II. Verses 22-28, Significance of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus
- III. Verses 29-36, Identification of Jesus' status

Each of these divisions is artfully introduced by a careful transition from what immediately precedes it.

The first division is introduced by a transition from the crowd's response to the tongues phenomenon (both a question: "What does this mean?" verse 12, and a criticism: "They are full of new wine," verse 13). Peter insists that this is not the effect of wine, but of the Holy Spirit, just as Joel described.

The conclusion of the Joel quote ("Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.") introduces the second division, in which Peter clearly lays out the two essential features of the gospel: the death (verses 22-23) and the resurrection (24-28). [\[32\]](#)

The conclusion of the division on the death and resurrection introduces the third division. The quote from Psalm 16:8-11 in the second division raised the question of just who this risen One is in relation to David. As will be seen in the following paragraphs, Peter gives a twofold answer to this question, and then summarizes his conclusion.

The second feature marking discourse boundaries and topic divisions is seen in this third division. The third division is subdivided by the threefold occurrence of the Greek conjunction οὐν *oun* which introduces verses 30, 33, 36. The significance of this word here is heightened by the fact that οὐν (*oun*), a fairly common Greek word in the NT (499x; 61x in Acts), occurs nowhere else in Peter's sermon. This threefold subdivision yields the following refinement to the third part of the outline:

- III. Verses 29-36, Identification of Jesus' status

- Verse 29 – Transition: The risen One is not David himself
 - A. Verses 30-32 – Resurrection tied to the Davidic promise and reigning
 - B. Verses 33-35 – Ascension tied to Melchizedekian priesthood and gifting
 - C. Verses 36 – Conclusion: Jesus is both (Melchizedekian) Lord and (Davidic) Messiah.

In the first subdivision, Peter identifies the risen One as David's descendant Who will be seated on David's throne. To support the idea of David's descendant being seated on the Davidic throne, Peter quotes Psalm 132: 11.

In the second subdivision, Peter notes that Jesus was not only raised to the earth so He could sit on David's throne, but He was also exalted to the right hand of God in order to fulfill the role of the Melchizedekian priest who pours out gifts on His people. To support the idea of this Melchizedekian priestly role, Peter quotes Psalm 110:1.

Psalms 132 and 110 in Peter's Sermon.

Darrell Bock insists that Peter, in Acts 2: 30 , purposely substituted the word καθίζω (*kathizo*) for the LXX's τίθημι (*tithemi*) (Ps 132: 11) in order to establish an exegetical "link" with Psalm 110 's κάθου (*kathou*) (cited in Acts 2: 34), thus establishing an interpretation for Psalm 110 which sees its fulfillment in terms of the Davidic Covenant. Bock strings together verses and concepts in an amazingly intricate fashion. He argues as follows:

The crucial linking allusion appears at this point. Peter notes that David was ... the conscious beneficiary of an oath God had made to him that one "of the fruit of his [David's] loins" (KJV) would sit on his throne (Acts 2: 30). The key term is καθίσαι, *kathisai* (to sit), which is reintroduced in the citation of Psalm 110 (note κάθου *kathou*, "sit," in v. 34). The allusion in verse 30 is to Psalm 132: 11 , a psalm which is strongly Israelitish and national in tone (see v v. 12-18). The psalm in turn is a reflection of the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7 , especially verse 12 . This 2 Samuel passage is better known as the Davidic covenant. What is crucial is that David's awareness of this covenant promise is immediately linked to his understanding of the resurrection promise in Psalm 16 , which in turn is immediately tied to the resurrection proof text of Psalm 110 (v v. 31-35). *Being seated on David's throne is linked to being seated at God's right hand.* In other words, Jesus' resurrection-ascension to God's right hand is put forward by Peter as a fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.... To say that Peter is only interested to argue that Messiah must be raised misses the point of connection in these verses and ignores entirely the allusion to Psalm 132 and the Davidic covenant. [\[33\]](#)

In another publication, where this same basic argument is put forth, Bock elucidates

upon his understanding of the hermeneutics at this point.

One of the ways Jews showed fulfillment of an OT passage was to cite the language in alluding to a second passage, thus linking the two texts conceptually. So by his use of the verb "to sit" (Acts 2: 30, 34) Peter links Psalm 132: 11 (cited in 2: 30) with Psalm 110 (cited in 2: 34). [\[34\]](#)

Crucial to Bock's argument is identifying Peter's reason for changing τίθημι (*tithemi*) to καθίζω (*kathizo*). He believes he has found the reason in a Jewish method of establishing a link. However, there are some problems with Bock's imagined "link."

First, καθίζω (*kathizo*) (Peter's "substitution" in Acts 2: 30) and κάθημαι (*kathemai*) [\[35\]](#) though cognate are in fact different words that are not entirely synonymous. While καθίζω (*kathizo*) can be either transitive ("to seat someone") or intransitive ("to sit"), κάθημαι (*kathemai*) is only intransitive ("to sit"). Had Peter wanted to establish an unquestionable "link" between the two citations by changing the wording of the LXX he could have used the same verb in both citations. Either one of two methods might have been employed for this purpose: (a) He might have phrased verse 30 in such a way as to use κάθημαι (*kathemai*) (e.g., ποιήσω αὐτὸν καθέσθαι ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ *poieso auton kathesthai epi ton thronon autou*), or (b) he could have quoted Ps 110 with a form of καθίζω (*kathizo*), which is frequently done by other NT authors both in quotations and in allusions to Ps 110: 1 (cf. Heb 1: 3 ; 8: 1 ; 12: 2 ; Mk 12: 36 [where the form of καθίζω (*kathizo*) is likely the better supported text]; Eph 1: 20 ; Rev 3: 21). Either of these approaches would have made such a proposed exegetical "link" much more likely, but Peter did not do so. Instead, he used two different words in citing the two texts. In light of this, it is risky at best to insist that Peter is necessarily establishing an exegetical "link" between Psalms 110 and 132 .

But even more damaging to Bock's interpretation is the fact that, after all, Peter did not change any wording at all. Bock's explanation of why Peter changed τίθημι (*tithemi*) to καθίζω (*kathizo*) is more complicated than it needs to be. Peter in fact did not take any terminology out of Psalm 110 to use in his citation from Psalm 132 ; rather, he merely combined verses 11 and 12 of Psalm 132 , where verse 12 refers to David's descendants (ultimately referring to the Messiah). Note carefully the terms used in these two verses:

Psalm 132: 11-12 , The LORD has sworn to David, A truth from which He will not turn back; "Of the fruit of your body I will set [Heb. יָשַׁב ('*asit*), LXX θήσομαι (*thesomai*) (from τίθημι, *tithemi*)] upon your throne. 12 If your sons will keep My covenant, and My testimony which I will teach them, their sons also shall sit [Heb. יֵשְׁבוּ (*yeshvu*), LXX καθιούνται (*kathiountai*) from καθίζω (*kathizo*)] upon your throne forever."

It is in verse 12, which refers to David's descendants who will sit upon David's throne, that the LXX translators used the verb καθίζω (*kathizo*). Peter did not import any words at all from Psalm 110 (which refers to the ascension) into his citation of

Psalm 132 . He merely combined the wording from verses 11 and 12 of Psalm 132 . Psalm 132 looks forward to the seating of the Messiah in the kingdom, but does not make any reference to the ascension.

As an illustration of the ambiguity involved in attempting to read rabbinic interpretive methods into the apostles' OT citations, note that Kilgallen, in his monograph on Peter's sermon, appeals to the exact same rabbinic method as does Bock, only Kilgallen argues for a link between Ps 110 and Joel 2 in Peter's sermon, based on the repetition of the word "Lord":

The correct manner of arguing that Jesus is Lord is, as far as the Jewish Peter is concerned before his Jewish audience, to find the text which fits properly with the text of Joel; that is, Peter should bring together the text of Joel regarding Lord and another text, using the title Lord, a text which clearly can be associated with Jesus of Nazareth. Peter uses here what is elsewhere a known Rabbinic practice of interpreting one of God's Words (that of Joel) by another text of God's Word.

To argue successfully that Jesus is Lord and thus to be called on for salvation, Peter draws upon the authoritative Old Testament Ps 110 : 'The Lord [YHWH] said to my Lord...' [\[36\]](#)

In Peter's sermon, he is simply citing various Old Testament passages to substantiate the points of his message. The citations from Ps 110 and 132 support *different* points of his message. Peter cites Psalm 132: 11-12 in Acts 2: 30 in support of Jesus' resurrection, as a part of the subsection in verses 30-32 proving His Davidic messiahship. In verse 33 , Peter introduces another subsection with the particle οὖν *oun*, describing Jesus' Melchizedekian ministry, supporting it by referring to Psalm 110: 1 . [\[37\]](#)

Conclusion

A major tenet of many progressive dispensationalists is the belief that Jesus began His Davidic reign at the ascension. This position unnecessarily and unscripturally mingles God's program for Israel with God's program for the church and thus weakens the argument for a pretribulational rapture. If proponents of progressive dispensationalism are correct, so be it. Exegesis should determine doctrine, not *vice versa*. If the Davidic reign has already begun, the pretribulational rapture must stand or fall on other arguments. However, a major argument many progressive dispensationalists give in support of Jesus' present Davidic reign suffers from significant problems. This argument comes from an attempted exegesis of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 . A close look at the way Peter carefully crafted his sermon, however, has shown that Peter did not signify that Jesus' Davidic reign began at the ascension. Rather, Peter distinguished between two different roles of Jesus: 1) The Davidic reign, made possible by the resurrection, but which will not begin until the second coming; and 2) the Melchizedekian priestly ministry which began at the ascension and will come to completion at the end of the tribulation period, thus

ushering in the Davidic reign.

[1] On Nov. 20, 1986, the Dispensational Study Group met at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta Georgia. Apparently an outgrowth of a previous informal meeting of about two dozen dispensationalists held at Talbot Theological Seminary in 1985 (Grace Theological Journal 10:2, Fall 1989, p.123) the group has continued to meet in conjunction with the annual ETS meeting. It was from the meetings of the Dispensational Study Group that progressive dispensationalism began to have its first wide spread appeal. Some of the early progressive dispensationalist scholars included Darrell Bock, Craig Blaising and Robert Saucy.

[2] For an analysis of progressive dispensationalist hermeneutics, see Robert Thomas, "A Critique of Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutics" in When the Trumpet Sounds, Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, edd. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995) 413-425.

[3] Craig Blaising, "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament" in Progressive Dispensationalism, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell Bock (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993) 264.

[4] Darrell L. Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ" in Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church, C.A. Blaising and D. L. Bock, edd. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 37-67.

[5] See his chapters in Progressive Dispensationalism, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell Bock (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993).

[6] Progressive Dispensationalism, 178-79.

[7] Progressive Dispensationalism, 259.

[8] Robert L. Saucy The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993) 72-73, 75.

[9] Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ" 49. Darrell L. Bock, "Evidence From Acts" in A Case for Premillennialism, D.K. Campbell and J.L. Townsend edd. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) 194.

[10] See the paper I coauthored with Jerry Neuman at http://www.shasta.edu/articles/ggunn/psalm110_article_dispensationalism.htm. In this paper, we argue that Ps 110 does not have the Davidic Covenant in view. Rather, it is a description of Christ's ministry during the Tribulation Period as a holy war king/priest who is like Melchizedek. In this role, Christ awaits the triumphal outcome of the holy war conflict of the Tribulation Period. Only after the triumph does his role change from that of Melchizedekian king/priest to that of Davidic king. See also G. Gunn and J.

Neuman, "Psalm 110" in Dictionary of Premillennial Theology, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996) 326-329.

[11] F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text With Introduction and Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951) 19.

[12] Bruce, Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text 96.

[13] I suppose that if Jesus had revealed all this to His very Jewish disciples, they would never have gotten very excited about proclaiming the gospel in the first place!

[14] W. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, F. W. Danker, & W. Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) ποιέω I.1.b.i, page 681.

[15] For example, Joseph Addison Alexander, The Gospel According to Matthew, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [reprint of orig. 1860 ed., Charles Scribner and Co.]) 435.

[16] The poetic reference in 1Chr 16:22 is to the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

[17] Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Vol. 9, edd. G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976) 512.

[18] D. Flusser, Society and Religion in the Second Temple Period, edd. Michael Avi-Yonah and Zvi Baras (Jerusalem: Masada Publishing Ltd., 1977) 30.

[19] Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Vol. 9, 521.

[20] Richard N. Longenecker, The Acts of the Apostles in "The Expositor's Bible Commentary" Vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) 281.

[21] Longenecker, 281.

[22] The NASB has "in what sense."

[23] Compare the Vulgate, *unde* "from where, whence; from whom, from which." Both Mt 22: 45 and Lk 20: 44 have the Greek πῶς "how?"

[24] Cf. Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, Bauer, s.v. πόθεν, 2; H. Alford, Alford's Greek Testament, 7th edition (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1874) I, 403.

[25] Darrell Bock, Progressive Dispensationalism, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993) 176-77.

[26] Bock, Progressive Dispensationalism, 177.

[27] W. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, F. W. Danker, & W. Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of

the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) καὶ I.6, page 393.

[28] F. Blass, A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) §444.3.

[29] F. Blass, A. Debrunner, §444.3.

[30] John Kilgallen in his monograph on Peter's sermon also argues for a strong distinction between the terms "Lord" and "Messiah," John J. Kilgallen, "'With many other words' (Acts 2,40): Theological Assumptions in Peter's Pentecost Speech" Biblica 83 (Rome : Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2002), 75-76.

[31] See, e.g., "epexegetical καὶ" in Blass, Debrunner, §444.9, or the ascensive use of καὶ in Dan Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996) 670-671.

[32] For the twofold nature of the NT gospel message, see 1Co 15: 3-8 , *Death*, vv. 3-4a; *Resurrection*, vv. 4b-8. The death is proved by the burial; the resurrection is proved by the sightings. See also 2Co 5:15 ; 1Th 4:14 ; etc.

[33] Darrell L. Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," 49, emphasis his.

[34] Darrell L. Bock, "Evidence From Acts" 194.

[35] The aor. impv. κάθου is used in both the LXX of Ps 109:1 (= 110:1 Heb. and Eng. texts) and Peter's quotation in Ac 2:34 .

[36] Kilgallen, 76.

[37] This second subsection is also resumptive of verses 14-21 and addresses the question of the tongues phenomenon. For resumptive use of οὖν cf. BAGD s.v. οὖν 2.b.; BDF §451(1). Peter's point is that these gifts are poured out from on high because Jesus has assumed authority as the Melchizedekian King/Priest (Cf. Eph 4:7-10).